United Nations E/CN.5/2019/NGO/30

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 November 2018

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fifty-seventh session
11–21 February 2019
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly
Priority Theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

Statement submitted by SOS Kinderdorf International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-18384 (E) 081118

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Statement

To holistically address the various inequalities in societies and the challenges to social inclusion, it is imperative that policies are designed and implemented with the aim of prioritizing the improvement of the lives of the most marginalized populations, thereby reaching the furthest behind first, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Children are more vulnerable to the effects of poverty and exclusion in general, and children without parental care even more so. This is because children who have become separated from their families and are in some form of alternative care, do not have the support of family members or access to safety nets to alleviate the burden of inequality and social exclusion. Also, children without parental care are automatically excluded from the reach of social protection policies that for children are usually delivered through the parental structure. Therefore, targeted resources and policies are needed to ensure basic security for this vulnerable group of children.

Child-sensitive social protection is essential to make sure that children without parental care, are not left behind but rather receive the attention and social support they need.

The creation of well-functioning social protection systems is also key to prevent family separation, as they provide a cushion to strengthen families in vulnerable situations and reduce vulnerabilities to economic, social or environmental challenges. Cash transfers, provision of adequate nutrition, increasing caregivers access to employment or income generation are examples of child-sensitive child protection services that are needed in order to prevent further harm for children.

Social protection for young people in alternative care and care-leavers, who are transitioning from life in alternative care to independent adulthood, is also important. In accordance with the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, which will mark its 10th anniversary in 2019, it is important to ensure that policies and services are instituted to improve their life chances and outcomes through appropriate preparation for leaving care as well as after-care support. Access to social, legal and health services together with appropriate financial support should be provided to young people leaving care and during after-care.

It is also crucial to ensure meaningful participation of children and young people in designing policies and programmes to ensure their opinions and ideas are reflected, and that this participation is continuous even in the assessment of social protection systems.

In order to accurately target these vulnerable child and young people, there is a need to know how many they are and where they are located. Unfortunately, sufficient data is lacking for some of the most marginalized populations who are currently not being counted, such as children without parental care - who are not in a household and therefore not included in most national household surveys. We urge Member States to endeavor to invest in mechanisms to properly identify children at risk so as to better support them and their families.

SOS Children's Villages w. uld like to remark and bring up a key, though often neglected issue in the functioning of social protection systems: the social workforce. Investing in, and adequately training social workers and care professionals is a key piece to ensure social protection reaches and protects the most marginalized children. Therefore, there should be adequate budgetary allocations to build the capacity of social workers, and efforts towards inter-sectoral training of professionals working in the provision of basic services to prevent vulnerable children and youth from falling between the cracks.

We call on Member States to pay special attention to these most vulnerable children and implement transformative policies to improve their lives and emphasize that we as civil society remain available to collaborate with you to fulfil! this goal.